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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ATHENS 001618

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SUBJECT: GREECE/MACEDONIA: PM KARAMANLIS' MESSAGE

REF: ATHENS 1594 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Charge' d'Affaires, a.i. Thomas Countryman
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY In a one-on-one meeting with Charge on August 9, Constantinos Bitsios, the Deputy Diplomatic Advisor to the Prime Minister, conveyed a message from PM Karamanlis. The PM asked the U.S. to convey to Skopje its view of the United Nations-sponsored negotiations on the name issue and the NATO accession process. In his message, the PM stressed that Greece sees the goal as a name that will be used by Skopje in all their international relationships -- not one that only Greece would use. A dual name was not within the mandate of the Nimitz process; Macedonia's accession into NATO was "closely linked" to resolution of the name issue. Charge agreed to convey the message, but urged the GoG to use effectively the opportunity that would exist between Greek parliamentary elections next month and a NATO decision on Macedonia's membership in early 2008. Karamanlis's message is the most direct indication we have had to date that Greece is prepared to veto Macedonia's NATO membership if it doesn't get a solution it can live with. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) On July 27, Charge met with Bitsios to discuss the Greek positions on resolving the name issue with Macedonia. Charge asked directly what Greece wanted the United States to do vis a vis the dispute. Bitsios urged the U.S. to make a clear statement to Skopje: they must move on the name issue. The GoM would have to accept some change to its name: "a prefix, a suffix, a hyphen ... something." He asked that the USG explain to the Macedonian government that the solution is not to find a name that is acceptable for Greece, but rather a name which will be used internationally. Bitsios expressed concern that some in the Greek MFA were engaged in "wishful thinking" hoping Greece might be able to avoid a decision on Macedonia's accession to NATO if other member nations concluded that the country had not met its accession obligations. Charge advised against engaging in any kind of a negative campaign toward the Macedonians and urged Greece to let fellow NATO allies decide the issue on its merits and for themselves.

13. (C) Charge urged the GoG to consider engaging in an informal but authoritative dialogue with Skopje on a wide range of issues as a way to build confidence. Recognizing the limits of public action in the immediate run-up to Greek elections, Charge conceded that neither FM would be appropriate interlocutors at this point, but was confident that both sides could find trusted and discrete advisors to engage in such a dialogue. He further urged Greece to consider what they might ask of Skopje in this process. For example, Greece might request assurances from Macedonia to not seek a change (following NATO accession) in the name they now use at the United Nations; the GoG might also request a

stronger re-affirmation from Macedonia that it will never seek to change its borders with Greece. Greece should, likewise, consider what the Macedonians might request of it. For example, the GoM could raise the issue of the existence of a Slavic-speaking Macedonian minority within Greek borders with defined rights. Charge told Bitsios that he was aware of how difficult this kind of an exchange could be for Greece, but stressed that after twelve years of sterile negotiations on the name issue, it might be time to seek a broader package.

¶4. (C) Charge told Bitsios it was also essential for the GoG to avoid the worst-case scenario: opposing Macedonia's NATO entry while avoiding any dialogue with the GoM. If all other NATO allies decided that Macedonia met the accession criteria, yet Greece alone vetoed their membership, the GoG would come under intense criticism -- not only from the U.S. -- for having failed to make any effort at bilateral dialogue. Bitsios said that his government would consider the suggestions and respond but first wanted to be assured that such a dialogue would not create "heartburn" for UN Special Envoy Nimetz nor be considered as a substitute for the Nimetz-led process. Charge advised that in all likelihood, Nimetz would welcome the opportunity to see the two sides meaningfully engaged in fruitful discussions.

¶5. (C) Charge stressed that timing was of the essence if a resolution is to be found in the near term. The window between Greek elections (now widely expected at the end of September 2007) and NATO's decision on Macedonia's fulfillment of its MAP obligations was the crucial time-frame. "The United States has not decided about Macedonia's accession and will not decide until the end of 2007," Charge told Bitsios, adding that Greece needs to think

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carefully about the next stage. Bitsios countered by asking if Greece could be assured that Undersecretary Burns will make this matter "a priority." Charge responded that there were a number of more burning issues that the USG saw as high priority in the coming months; the Undersecretary would, of course, weigh Greece's request as well.

FOLLOW-UP MESSAGE FROM PM

¶6. (C) On August 9, Bitsios asked Charge to meet to pass a message from Prime Minister Karamanlis. The PM, Bitsios said, welcomed and appreciated any assistance that the United States can give in resolving this matter. On the question of what, precisely, the GoG was seeking, the PM wished to emphasize four points:

-- The GoG considers it hugely important that Skopje understands that the content and the purpose of the Nimitz negotiations is not to find a name for Greece to use in its dealings with Macedonia, but for Macedonia to find a name that it will use in all of its international relationships, i.e., a "dual name" solution is outside of the mandate of these negotiations;

-- The main objective of the GoG is to find a permanent solution to the name issue. The GoG wants to concentrate on this alone and believes that resolution of other issues will follow a solution on the name issue;

-- Greece has done its share on substance in trying to resolve the name issue and it is now up to Skopje to reciprocate;

-- It must be made clear to Skopje that NATO accession is "closely linked" to resolution of the name issue.

¶7. (C) Charge asked Bitsios if he wanted to be more clear about what "closely linked" with the name issue meant. Bitsios, however, declined to elaborate. Charge told Bitsios

that while he understood the Greek belief that all other matters would follow the resolution of the name issue, he still believed that an open discussion of all bilateral issues would help to make a compromise more likely. Notwithstanding, he assured Bitsios that the PM's message would be conveyed to Washington. He added that the U.S. can and will help in the resolution of the long-standing name dispute, but, in response to a question from Bitsios as to how energetically the USG would press the matter, Charge said that the USG does not/not link NATO accession to the name issue. Moreover, Charge stated that while we are willing to help, the USG cannot guarantee the result desired by Athens, for two reasons. First, the Macedonians are presently engaged in trying to resolve a host of MAP issues that they see as more urgent and more substantial than the name issue. Second, the GoG should not underestimate the political realities and sensitivities in Skopje. Charge concluded emphasizing that the time-frame between Greek elections and NATO's decision was the most crucial; the GoG needed to think about the contingencies.

18. (C) COMMENT: Previous discussion of the name issue between GoG and the U.S. officials, including in June with Undersecretary Burns, contained few specifics -- just a plea that the USG somehow solve this problem. The Prime Minister has now specifically requested us to convey the Greek view to Skopje. In fact, the Greek position appears to raise the bar for success of the Nimetz process. Karamanlis has firmly rejected any consideration of a "dual name" solution -- and linked Macedonia's NATO accession to an outcome acceptable to Greece. It is the clearest indication we have received to date that Karamanlis is prepared to veto Macedonia's entry into NATO, even if Greece stands alone among the Allies.

19. (C) COMMENT (cont.): From Embassy Athens point of view, the USG should continue to convey to the GoM:

-- the Greek threat -- to veto membership even as 'FYROM' -- must be taken seriously.

-- Macedonia -- even while concentrating on MAP fulfillment -- must negotiate seriously in the next Nimetz round.

As to whether the USG should advise the GoM that (as the Greeks believe) a dual-name solution is outside of the Nimetz mandate, we have to defer to a close reading in Washington of that mandate.

COUNTRYMAN